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SIN DESTITUTE

OF THE

APOLOGY OF INABILITY:

OR,

MORAL INABILITY

NO CONSTITUENT OF HUMAN NATURE.

BY A CHRISTIAN,
THE AUTHOR OF "MORAL AGENCY."

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MORAL INABILITY,

&c.

LET the moral characters of men be what they may, they have minds, and must think. When they hear the impenitent represented as the subjects of such a helpless inability, as must shield them from all just imputation of guilt, and in the same discourse devoted to destruction for not doing what had been previously acknowledged to be beyond their power to accomplish, the inconsistency is discerned; and their reason pronounces, that no improvement can be fairly required, where a talent has not been intrusted. Such incongruities are, in this day, both inculcated and censured by presbyterians. One of them, to cure the evil, has exhibited, in strong characters, the nature and extent of a sinner's inability, shown the kind of supernatural aid which he needs, and that it is merely gratuitous, being unnecessary to the vindication of Divine justice. Another has undeniably proved, that these were the doctrines of the reformation, and particularly of our own divines. In opposition to these important services, there came forth two editions of "An Essay on the Inability of Sinners, by a Presbyterian." An answer became indispensable, unless truth must succumb to error. It was denominated, "Moral Agency,—by a Christian." This pamphlet has produced three reviews.

The first review affirms, what the *Presbyterian* only could pronounce: "That the *very design* of the essay is to show, that to assert, that the sinner has full ability to do holy actions, because he has natural ability to do natural actions, or actions that are not holy, would be

incorrect and unwarrantable.”* To tell the impenitent, they have full ability to repent and believe, when defective of moral ability to do so, is deemed by the Presbyterian *unwarrantable*. But the language objected to, is a commination of the unrenewed, because they have no heart to holy duties, and therefore, at the same time, *implies moral or culpable inability*, and censures the abuse of their *natural powers*, which are fit for, and ought be occupied in, the service of God; it is consequently doctrinally *warrantable*. It appears also to him *incorrect*, to say, there is power to perform an action, when the will, which is indispensable, is wanting. But, if the power, or ability essential to the performance of an action, includes and implies the will or desire, then no man, who disobeys or disbelieves, can be blamed, since his defect of will is a defect of power; and thus every suffering culprit is punished for that which he had no power to avoid. Is the Presbyterian satisfied to say, that he is *unable* to confer a benefit, when the inclination only is defective? The mind exercises power in willing, and *the will* is therefore denominated a *power*; but there is no want of this power merely because there is no desire of a particular action; for when we speak of a man’s power or ability to perform an action, his inclination is a distinct consideration; nor is a defect of it a defect of a power, for the party has the power of willing. The bent or inclination of *the will*, if a power, is the power of a power, not a power *of the man*; but it is neither a power of a power, nor a defect of power; for power is strength,† and moral ability is consequently an ability only in a figurative, not a literal sense. When, therefore, the only obstacle to the performance of an action is indisposition, the party is *correctly* said to have full power or ability to do it, and immemorial usage justifies the pronouncing a man to have power to do a thing, or comprehend a truth, whilst his inclination, which is indispensable, may be known to be adverse. The unrenewed man is indisposed to use his natural powers in the service of God, and never

* Religious Remembrancer, Sept. 18, 1819.

† “Potentia is virtus agendi.”

does thus apply them till changed by grace: in this defect of holiness lies his guilt. What advantage then can arise from exonerating him of just blame, by alleging an undefined defect of ability, when an inclination to obey only is wanting? As those natural powers are the talents, by the neglect or abuse of which he becomes actually guilty, every attempt to diminish his responsibility, by concealing them from his view, and every effort to turn his want of a heart into a want of ability, in the literal sense, to do what God has required, must be calculated to weaken or prevent a conviction of conscience, and to arraign the justice of the righteous Sovereign of the universe.

The third* review of "Moral Agency," or the formal reply to the Christian, is published in "The Quarterly Theological Review;" for which "the conductor is indebted to A Presbyterian." The spirit, in which this review is written, is a little repulsive; its febrile tendency, and the hard names with which it abounds, flow from moral inability, and are sorrowful coruscations of latent imperfection in a good man. They shall stimulate the Christian to more vigilance against any thing that might offend; his cause requires no such aid; he will therefore repress, where truth, too severe, might awaken sensibility. Such gentleness is the more difficult, where the principal hope has been, and still is, to counteract a design, *silent as the grave*, in which the essay is *but a single link of a lengthy chain of efforts*. The inception also of the essay, with the admission of a distinction, the practical application of which it every where combated, was a profundity, which could not but be disclosed. The essay, not the essayist, was his object; now it is the review, not the Presbyterian; whom he hopes and believes to be a servant of Christ, though, like himself, an earthen vessel.

The "Essay on the Inability of Sinners," furnishes a shield, which the enemies of the gospel well know how to wield in their own defence. That such a use of his essay had been contemplated by the Presby-

* The second was officious; it shall receive the Christian's respects in the end of this number.

terian, we do not believe, but it has eventuated. A Universalist, whose review will presently pass before us, pronounces the essayist, to have "exposed the doctrines of the Presbyterians so clearly," that they will never "be able to vindicate divine justice, in the condemnation of the impenitent!" and denominates that a pernicious doctrine, which blames "the creature, for what exists in him naturally, and what *he has never had it in his power to remove.*" The reviewing Presbyterian in vain vindicates the concessions of his essay, by referring us to his former expressions, "his hearers will be convinced, that their impotence, from whatever source it may arise, is criminal, and furnishes them with no excuse." Because, if the impotence be not of the moral kind, it is an excuse, and every unshackled conscience speaks it to be such; and yet to put this characteristic of it out of sight, by blending it with that which is natural, it is a painful duty to say, was obviously a premeditated effect of that laboured production.

The Presbyterian in his review of the allegation of the Christian, that the Essayist had admitted the law of God, "to be at present disproportional to human powers," by saying, "had man, we admit, been originally created in his present state, the law by which he is governed, would indeed have been disproportionate to his powers;" (Essay, p. 20.) has now referred us to the *next page*, as a proof, "that he has made no such absurd concession." One page cannot alter the sense of the words of another, but may show, that the writer possesses sentiments, different from those which he had previously expressed. The second review is a competent proof, that the Christian was not mistaken. Its author observes, (p. 13.) that the Christian "is aware that his brother Presbyterian has so exposed this argument of theirs—that the unbelievers will take some advantage of it." On the page of the Essay, to which we are directed by the Presbyterian, are these words; "What is the question then at issue? not whether man possesses natural faculties, but how a creature possessing these faculties in a state so corrupted, and disordered by sin, as to be rendered unable to obey the

Divine law, can be justly required to yield an obedience beyond his ability? Now, to affirm that man has natural ability to yield obedience, is no answer to the question; for it amounts to nothing more, than to assert, what is asserted in the question; that he has understanding, will and affections." (Essay, p. 21.) Here the Presbyterian represents the creature, man, as "possessing faculties in a state so corrupted, and disordered by sin, as to be rendered "unable to obey the Divine law;" and supposes the gordian knot to be, how man, so circumstanced, "can be justly required to yield an obedience beyond his ability?" He then supposes us to answer "that man has natural ability to yield obedience;" the law, how pure soever, requiring no more than justice would dictate, a compliance to the extent of our natural power, but he denies this to be an answer, it being implied in the question. If then the question does suppose man to possess natural ability to obey, or in other words, that his faculties are commensurate to all that justice requires of them, though the law is perfect, and infinitely exceeds all created purity, the question is narrowed down to mean no more than, *Whether the Lord is just in requiring us to obey, when nothing prevents our compliance, but our aversion to holiness, or love to sin?* If moral inability is no excuse, which we all admit, why did the Presbyterian tender an issue upon this question? The answer must be, either he intended to confound the distinction, by blending natural and moral inability together; a charge he denies; or, by attaching moral inability to our natural faculties, and accounting the encumbrance as some excuse for the disobedience of man, to raise a doubt upon the justice of the Divine law. If the latter was the view, then this page to which he has referred us, for proof, that he has made "no concession, that the law of God is, at present, disproportional to human powers," is so far from being a vindication from the charge, that it leads us, when thus analyzed, to the same conclusion. It is matter of grief, that the pious Presbyterian, in an essay of so much publicity, should propose it as a questionable point, whether, when a hardened culprit alleges

in defence of his wickedness, that he does not choose to obey, and will not submit to the authority of God, justice is on his side? The author of the second review has accordingly affirmed, that "to demand of such a creature spiritual obedience, whilst this natural defect, or moral defect, which is natural to this creature, in consequence of its being derived, remaineth, would be as unjust as to command a cripple to bear arms." He well knows, that if he can prove, that an evil heart is excusable because natural, he may safely publish a general gaol-delivery; and the Presbyterian's doubt, of the *justice of requiring obedience beyond man's ability*, was a motive well calculated to awaken his energies to a vigorous effort.

It was to have been expected from the scope of his Essay, that the reviewing Presbyterian should maintain his old ground; "That had man been originally created in his present state, the law by which he is governed, would have been disproportionate to his powers." Accordingly he now asserts, that to hold the contrary is to admit that "God might justly have created man at first with a sinful nature." (p. 342.) The Christian had alleged, that the confession of the Essayist, that under such circumstances, the law of God would have been disproportionate to human powers, was an unwarrantable concession. The law is not disproportionate to the *natural* or *physical powers* of man; for though perfect, the measure of duty is always the extent of natural ability in any state; and it can require no less than all, because either would be injustice. If disproportionate, it must therefore be to man's *moral powers*. But man has none until grace is received, and had the law yielded an iota to man's moral inability, or aversion to holiness, it would have been itself unholy. Consequently the Presbyterian's admission, that the demand of perfect holiness from a creature, whose heart is averse to it, is disproportionate or excessive, is a plain acknowledgment, that *moral inability, or hatred of holiness is an excuse for disobedience*. Thus is it lamentably plain, that this argument of the Essayist is opposed to Divine justice; and it is a melancholy reflec-

tion, that it is perfectly coincident, with the whole tenor of that unhappy production, and opposed to the doctrines of our church.*

To deny that, "the law by which (man) is governed, would have been disproportionate to his powers," had he been created as he now is, is by no means an admission, "that the Creator might justly have created man at first, with a sinful nature;" this is to put the supposition in the sentence, in the place of that which is affirmed; it amounts to no more, than an admission,

* "Notwithstanding the soul's *natural capacities*, before asserted and inferred, its *moral incapacity*, I mean its wicked aversion from God, is such as none but God himself can overcome. Nor is that aversion the less culpable, for that it is so hardly overcome, but the more. 'Tis an aversion of *will*; and who sees not, that every man, is more wicked, according as his *will* is more wickedly bent? Hence impotency or *inability* to turn to God, is not such as that he cannot turn if he would; but it consists in this, that he is not willing."

"Many may be almost persuaded, and even within reach of heaven, not far from the kingdom of God, may seek to enter and not be able, their hearts being somewhat inclinable, but more averse; for they can only be *unable*, as they are unwilling." These are the words of the Rev. John Howe, fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, who "was universally esteemed for his learning, moderation, and great virtues," a most conspicuous Presbyterian divine, who died at London 1705, aged 75 years.

The Christian had said, "The Prolocutor of the Westminster General Assembly, who made the Confession, well understood and expalined this distinction. It is not probable that those who framed our standards, would have made them speak the opposite of their own views of sound doctrine." To which the Presbyterian has replied; "This however is mere assertion, it contains no proof." To establish the truth of the assertion, here follow the words of Dr. Twisse, the reverend Prolocutor. "*Impotentia faciendi quod Deo gratum est et acceptum, non est impotentia naturæ, sed morum. Nulla etenim nobis deest facultas naturæ per peccatum originale, juxta illud Augustini: 'Nulli agnoscendæ veritatis abstulit facultatem. Ad huc remanet potentia, qua facere possumus quæcumque volumus.'*" Naturalem potentiam, quidlibet agendi pro arbitrio ipsorum, dicimus ad omnes transmitti, non autem potentiam moralem." Which we translate thus; "The inability of doing what is pleasing and acceptable to God, is not an inability of *nature*, but of *morals*. For no faculty of nature is wanting to us by original sin, according to that of *Augustine*; "It hath taken from no one the power of knowing the truth, still there remains the ability, by which we are able to do, whatsoever we choose." The natural ability, of accomplishing any thing at their pleasure, we affirm, is transmitted unto all, but not the moral ability." The Presbyterian has introduced a remark from Dr. Witherspoon, the "*spirit*" of which, he supposes, is to show that, what we term a *moral* inability is *natural*; we refer him to the words of the Doctor, Works, 1st vol. p. 277. "I hope no christian will assert, that any person in the world, who hath the exercise of reason, is under a *natural*, but only under a *moral* impossibility of coming to the knowledge, and doing the will of God." *Idem*, p. 45, note. "The inability is only *moral*, and lies wholly in the aversion of our hearts from such employment."

that if *man be supposed* to have been created such as he now is, *the law would have been proportionate to his powers*. And it has been just shown, that if the converse of this be true, a heart opposed to the law excuses disobedience; and thus, that indisposition to obey is a justification, which every criminal code pronounces the essence of guilt.

The servants of Christ ought to be exemplarily mild. Why should one brother pronounce of another, that unless he will submit to hold, that the law is disproportionate to the powers of man, which the Christian cannot do, his opinions "lead to the shocking doctrine, that God might be the author of sin?" The Christian's want of "sagacity" is nevertheless humanely supposed to have prevented such consequence, and charity withholds the imputation, "*unless the Christian shall openly avow*" his belief, *that God is the author of sin*. It is a painful reflection, that the Christian has no means of throwing this burden from himself, but by casting it on him from whom it proceeded. The Presbyterian has *openly avowed* his belief, that if man had been made such as he now is, and placed under the law, "it would have been disproportionate to his powers," and consequently unjust. This would have been iniquity, not in man, but in Him in whom there can be no defect. Now this could not have been, unless sin is a something positive, and not a mere defect, as the scriptures represent it.* The Presbyterian has therefore professed his belief, that sin is something positive, and has a cause, and thereby reduced himself to the necessity of admitting, either two first causes, or that *God is the author of sin*. Thus he has, no doubt imperceptibly, with all his "sagacity," plunged himself into the very pit, which his charity had prepared for his brother, and into which he would have jostled him, had not some surviving regard,

* חטא אֵין (from חטא to deviate) a missing the mark, פָּשָׁע to pass, a defect, פָּעַךְ to turn aside, a perversion; αμαρτια, αδικια, απειθεια, ασεβεια, ανομια, all begin with the privative letter. The old opinion was "οὐκ ὄντα γὰρ ἐστὶ τὰ κακά; ὄντα δὲ τὰ καλά, ἐπεὶ διέπρεψεν ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄντος Θεοῦ γεγονόσιν." Evil is a non-entity, but good exists, seeing it was produced by God, who exists.

at least to public opinion, disappointed the mischievous design.

That the law is *disproportionate* to human powers, the reviewer next attempts to prove,* from the Institutes, his term *disproportionate* not being found in the Scriptures. "Wherefore let them no more urge the *proportion* of our ability to the precepts of the law, as though the Lord had regulated the standard of righteousness, which he designed to give in the law to our imbecility." Calvin is here speaking of no other, than *moral ability* and *imbecility*, for he affirms "that the power of obedience proceeds from the goodness of God," and that we derive "our whole strength from the assistance of divine grace."† The idea of *proportion*, he expressly shows, comes from *his adversaries*. The opinion of this learned man, though of no authority, is correct; that the law justly demands obedience, when there is no moral ability. Of natural powers he has said nothing at the place; but the summary of the law declares, that the requisition is precisely equal to their extent; no more than *all our strength* being required, and nothing less accepted.

It is difficult to decide, from the language of the Presbyterian, whether he thinks, that man is required to act beyond his natural powers; or that, without grace, he has some moral ability. He asserts one design of his Essay to have been, "to prove that man, in his fallen state, without the renewing grace of God, is really *unable*, call the inability what you will, to keep the commandments of God, in that pure and perfect manner, which is demanded," p. 349. By the

* How can the Presbyterian extricate himself, from the anathema denounced by Jerom, an early father, to whom we are indebted for much information? His sentence is, "maledictus qui dicit, Impossibilia Deum precipisse; et maledictus qui dixerit Legem esse possibilem." *Cursed is the man, who says, God has commanded impossible things; and cursed is he, who may have said, the law is possible.* This language, though paradoxical upon the principles of the Essay, is accurately discriminative; for it supposes, that the law of God, though perfect, exacts no more of any man, than God has given him the *natural ability* to perform; but that through the corruption of his nature, he has lost the *moral ability* to obey it; and even when regenerated, being not wholly renewed, he *cannot* keep it perfectly.

† Lib. II. c. v. s. 7.

terms man is "unable to keep the commandments, without the renewing grace of God," we should suppose *moral inability* is intended, since this is relieved by grace. If so, one professed design of the Essay was to prove the moral inability of sinners, and the necessity of supernatural aid, against those who have never denied either. Yet the inability, though real, he supposes to be not total, since it only extends to prevent the keeping of the commandments, "*in that pure and perfect manner, which is demanded.*" If by *unable*, on the other hand, be intended a physical inability; then one design of the Essay is, to prove, that the Lord will reap where he has not sown, and will require the improvement of talents he never intrusted to the party. This is much worse. The passage in the review very justly describes the design of the Essay, which was to use the general term *unable*, and leave us to "call the inability what (*we*) will." And the purposed confusion of senses has rendered the professed "design" of his Essay, doctrinally unsound, in what way soever it is understood.

When we read in the essay and review, of the necessity of "natural ability to do natural actions," and of "moral ability to do moral or holy actions," we are not to conclude, that natural ability is never exercised in the performance of moral or holy actions; for the Presbyterian has also said, that "the union of two powers, natural and moral, is necessary to qualify a man for yielding obedience to the divine law." The union of these two constitutes man's ability to obey, which third kind of ability, he alleges, is lost, "if one, the moral for instance, of the requisite powers be destroyed." Of this new ability, the Universalist has observed, that, "perhaps to have called it by the name of either," that is, natural or moral, "would have been improper," and agrees with the Presbyterian, that, "by taking away one ability, essential to such a union, the whole of the united ability of such powers is taken away"—"and of course" there is "no ability to obey." By this artful representation, an imagined excusable impotency is substituted, in the place of a criminal opposition of the heart;

and thus every charge of guilt made upon the conscience of the sinner is to be easily parried by the plea of inability. Against a result so mischievous, discrimination is the remedy. A man is *naturally unable* to do a thing, when he *cannot* do it, if he will. But man is not thus naturally unable to obey a law, which, though more perfect than the purest creature, is exactly co-extensive with his natural powers; he is therefore physically able to perform it, if he will; and if the moral law be such, it follows, that man has all the natural, that is, physical ability which is necessary to the performance of his duty, whether he chooses to obey or not. As every action of a moral agent, voluntarily performed, is *moral*, in a large sense of the term; that is, it is one for which he is accountable; then the *natural actions*, for which he is said, by the Presbyterian, to have natural powers, are *moral*, that is, either sinful or holy; the word moral being taken in such extensive meaning. But when used with the term ability, moral is restricted to mean virtuous or holy. The *natural ability*, whether corporal or mental, of a moral agent, is denominated *natural*, not in the sense of *native*, but of *proper to man as man*, or belonging to his nature. If the inclinations of such agent be defective of moral purity, he is said to be destitute of moral ability; this is man's natural or native condition; that is, he is born thus defective of right propensities. If sin were even something positive, (but it is not,) it is not essential to him as man; for Christ was not sinful, and was a man. Such moral inability, therefore, is not natural to man, in the sense of a necessary constituent of his nature, but connatural with him; and the defect remains until moral ability, or a holy disposition, be supernaturally given. As long as his *native* indisposition to exert his natural ability in the duty assigned him by the law remains, his non-compliance is certain, and he is said to be *unable*; but he is not literally unable who possesses competent, or, as some speak, *full and ample* natural ability. This inability, which is not strictly such, but merely a defect of a right desire, is distinguished by the phrase *moral inability*. Thus the word *inability*, when used to ex-

press the defect of *moral ability*, or a holy disposition, is used in an analogical sense, and by no means in its original import: for its proper signification is a want of strength or power to effect what he might will to do. This distinction is justified by common language, for it is not unusual to hear a person, charged with a fault, declare he was *incapable* of doing it; when he means his virtue rendered it impossible. *Moral* is in this distinction opposed to *natural*, not as the latter signifies native, or connatural, but as it denotes that which is *a constituent of human nature*, and is that which Calvin terms *supernatural*. Every moral agent possesses, as such, *natural ability*, for which he is accountable; if he possesses not a holy disposition, no matter to what cause his defect may be referred, he will not rightly apply his natural powers, and is said to be *morally unable*; but this inability is his crime. And how much soever the Presbyterian, and the author of the Candid Review, may combine the excusable with the inexcusable inability, with a view of erecting a new inability, that man may become a helpless instrument, where either of the constituents may be wanting, Eternal Wisdom will one day discriminate, and show that man's *natural ability* was *amply sufficient* for his duty, and that his *moral inability* was so far from excusing, that it will prove a just ground of *eternal punishment*. The sentiments of the Presbyterian are painfully in opposition to this representation of things; his language is, "when put to the test, the faculties of sinful man prove *insufficient to the work required of him*; and he learns the mortifying truth, that he is indeed unable to perform his duty." p. 347. Thus the "*sinful man*" is supposed to do "what is required of him," and addressing himself sincerely to the work, he "puts to the test (his) faculties," which, upon a fair and full trial, he finds "insufficient for the work required of him." Of course, man having done all he could, with a proper intention to accomplish "the work required of him," he must be innocent. Let the pious Presbyterian himself say, upon whom *he has cast the blame*, if the defect lie only in the insufficiency of the faculties of the creature to perform

“the work required of him.” The Word of Eternal Truth has represented the carnal mind as in a state of enmity, but the Presbyterian has described the “sinful man” as *mortified* that “he is indeed unable to perform his duty.” An unrenewed man never puts his faculties to such a *test*, and feels no such *mortification*; he, at the most, desires only the advantages of religion; he has no heart “to perform his duty.” His faculties are sufficient to establish his guilt, in *not* having *tested them*; and to assert, that they are insufficient to the work required,” approximates an arraignment of the justice of God.

The Presbyterian, after various unsuccessful efforts to confound the distinction by novel combinations of the different kinds of inability, has, at length, p. 355, admitted, what we from the first suspected he held, two distinct impediments, *the one physical, the other moral*; a “blindness of the mind,” and an “opposition of the will.” “Now instruction, illumination, have for their immediate object, not the will, but the understanding.” This he describes as “*a teaching distinct from that external teaching which arises from the ministry of the word; a teaching, which is produced by a divine illuminating influence on the mind; a teaching, without which the reading and hearing of the word will never be accompanied with saving efficacy.*” His opinion is, “that divine grace *reaches the will through the understanding*, or, in other words, that ordinarily divine grace operates *first* on the understanding, and then on the will.” If some hearer of the Presbyterian should thus accost him; “Sir, I have been greatly consoled; your representation of my irreligion, as existing in my understanding, proves, what I always thought, that I was innocent; inasmuch as I was acting according to my best light; and that, as I have had no better knowledge, it is not my fault, since it is not to be obtained from the written word.” It would, no doubt, be highly instructive to hear the preacher’s answer. As the Essay on Inability is a designed correction of certain presbyterian ministers, the author would confer an additional favour, if he should distinguish this “teaching,” since it is both

specific and immediate, from the inspiration of *suggestion*; and if, since the effect is the same, he would tell us, what necessity there is of the Scriptures, seeing “all” are thus immediately “taught of God;” and whether such immediate reception of ideas is supported by the experience of the saints? Also, as this teaching is communicated to the understanding before the will is affected, how it happens that the knowledge of God and his holiness does not exasperate the heart, which is confessedly, at that juncture, at enmity with God, and disposed to account the things of God foolishness? As the clearly defined ground, which the Presbyterian has at last taken, is that of an inability distinct from indisposition and every thing voluntary; if he can prove and establish it, he has discovered the great arcanum, which shall ever hereafter give confidence to the unregenerate, and prove an effectual defence against the criminations announced by the heralds of the Gospel. They generally teach, that by the fall every faculty of the mind and power of the body may have partaken of the exigency, but that they are sufficiently strong to produce guilt by the neglect of them. They hold, that man is dead in sin, for which he has no excuse; and as it implies an indisposition and opposition to a holy God, his condemnation is just. They teach, that life, “spiritual activity,”* or a disposition towards God and holiness, is the new creation, which is accomplished in him who is regenerated, or savingly, but imperfectly, restored to the image of God. That this is discovered only by its fruits; among which one is, when *the heart is opened to attend* to divine things, there is a discernment of truths, which had been seen merely in theory without conviction, under a new aspect, and in an affecting *light*. That thus the mind is *illuminated* by the Spirit of God shining into it, or giving it the light of the knowledge of the glory of God; and the man experiences a being born of the Word, because he has been previously born of the Spirit. Thus “coming,”† or believing, and being

* “Actuositas Spiritualis.”

† John vi. 44. Ὁυδείς δύναται ἔλθεῖν πρὸς με, &c. Hesychius puts for δύνασθαι, θελεῖν; and for ἐθέλειν, ἡδύνατο. Schleusner gives volo, i. q. θελω

“taught,” though first perceived, are consequent upon the “drawing,” which expresses more immediately the Divine influence, and are each of them, as well as the exercise of *every faculty*, properly referred to the work of God. The natural powers become instruments of righteousness as soon as the heart of man is rectified by grace. It is grace, because they were previously fit for, and ought to have been occupied in, the same work, the neglect of which merited condemnation, not spiritual help, which is therefore purely *gratuitous* in Christ.

The Presbyterian has, in support of his “philosophy” of illumination, introduced the Confession of Faith, on effectual calling, in which *enlightening* is enumerated before renovation. There is a *call* of many, of whom “few are chosen,” and a *call*, every subject of which is justified, sanctified, and eventually brought to glory; the external call, nevertheless, may in each instance be the same. When it becomes effectual, the Spirit of God renders it such. He is then said to “enlighten the mind in the knowledge of Christ.” If this illumination were, as the Presbyterian imagines, an immediate communication of “the knowledge of Christ,” it would supersede the external call, not render it *effectual*. Does he mean, that the compilers of our standards of doctrines intend by the phrase “effectual calling,” a voice distinct from the word? or does the Presbyterian intend no more than mere *moral suasion*, when he says “the understanding is enlightened by (the) Spirit, who reaches the heart through the leading faculty”? p. 455. If the

as one of the senses of *δυναμαι*. Matt. xvi. 3. xx. 22. *δυνασθε πινειν το ποτηριον*; Will you drink of the cup? Mark vi. 5. *και ουκ ηδυνατο εκει*; and he was *unwilling* to perform there any miracle. Heb. iv. 15. *’Ου γαρ εχμεν αρχιερεα μη δυνάμενοι*, for we have not an high priest *unwilling* to sympathize with our infirmities. The Septuagint, in Job vi. 7. has *ου δυναται*, which the Hebrew, and the Chaldee paraphrast have *refused*. The Vulgate has *nolebat*. In what instances *δυναμαι* should be so rendered, the sense of the passage will determine. Here the coming to Christ is obviously meant of voluntary action, but the inclination never exists in fallen man until he is made willing by supernatural influence. It is, therefore, *no one will come unto me, unless the Father draw him*. The word *δυναται* was preferred to *θει*, because the indisposition is a barrier equally effectual as an incapacity; but to represent it as proving a *physical inability*, is to pervert the passage into an apology for sinning.

former be designed, his "philosophy" rises to enthusiasm: if the latter, it sinks into Socinianism. That the understanding is enlightened, is importantly true; and that this is often the first perceived evidence of renovation, is cheerfully conceded; but it by no means results, that this is the *immediate* work of the Spirit in regeneration. *Enlightened* is a figurative expression; it must not be understood of material light, but of knowledge, views, or ideas. If these are cast into the mind immediately by the Holy Spirit, this is the inspiration of suggestion, which is thought by our church to have ceased. The Spirit does not, therefore, where he enlightens, immediately communicate knowledge. But when he has "opened the heart," removed its prejudices, changed the moral disposition, by an unknown supernatural influence, denominated grace, or by the communication of life, or activity towards moral good, he has removed the barrier, which excluded the saving light, or knowledge, which the written word might have communicated, or has given it an efficacy not before experienced. The principal difference between the sentiments of the Presbyterian, "that divine grace reaches the will, *through the understanding*," p. 355, and that of those who think, that the only influence of the *Holy Spirit* lies in moral suasion, seems to consist in this, that he imagines a supernatural inspiration. If the will is *reached through the understanding*, the influence is mediate, not immediate with respect to the will; they agree therefore in this, that the sinner is left to yield to, or reject, the light communicated to his understanding, by a sovereign act of his own will. But the Scriptures invert this order; they suppose the understanding to be prejudiced by the heart; "*the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God*," not from any physical incapacity to perceive them, but "*because they are foolishness unto him*." To be deemed foolishness, they must have been in some manner seen. "*Neither can he know them*," not because of any defect in the natural faculty of the understanding, but "*because they are spiritually discerned*;" they are rightly seen only by

the holy.* The soul which is changed, or determined towards God, is enlightened with truth, or made to discern Him, who had previously been an unaffected object of contemplation, with anxious solicitude, unaccustomed pleasure, and holy awe. The cause is supernatural, the effect is moral; but if physical, we could not have been exhorted to effect the change for ourselves, by the *renewing* of our own minds.†

The darkness or ignorance of the unrenewed mind is, in proportion unto the means of knowledge, culpable; but how can ignorance be imputable, if knowledge can be derived only from immediate supernatural inspiration? If the word is able to make us wise unto salvation, provided the will applies the understanding unto it without prejudice, ignorance is guilt. Regeneration and illumination are not convertible terms. In order of time they are as necessarily successive as cause and effect. A change of heart must produce knowledge;‡ for the mind, disposed to receive truth, will become wiser. Thus the “leading faculty,” the understanding, seems to be led and directed, whilst a reaction may also be admitted, because the increase of spiritual knowledge must enable the renewed will to choose the good discovered. But if, as the Presbyterian believes, a change of heart be the effect of light, that is, of knowledge supernaturally communicated, and such change can be no otherwise effected, the indisposition of the heart to spiritual good has lost its moral character, and become innocent. This theory supposes the will to be better than it is, and goes to justify the impenitent. The will, it is freely acknowledged, cannot be exercised in choosing what is in no degree seen; but the truth may be seen and holden in unrighteousness. The light

* 1 Cor. ii. 14. Πνευματικῶς, ἢ πνευματικὸς, qui ἅγιος et δικαίος dicitur. Vide Rom. vii. 14. Thus Chrysostom τοῦτο γὰρ ἐστὶν εἶναι πνευματικὸν τὸ πάντων ἀμαρτημάτων ἀπαγεῖν.

† Rom. xii. 2. Μεταμορφουσθε τῇ ἀνακαινώσει τοῦ νοῦς ὑμῶν. The same word is referred to the work of the Spirit. Tit. iii. 6. ἀνακαινώσεως πνεύματος ἁγίου.

‡ Εὰν τις θέλῃ τὸ θέλημα αὐτοῦ ποιεῖν, γνώσεται, &c. John vii. 17. If any one be willing to do his will, he shall know, &c.

which is received before a change of heart, like the faith which precedes regeneration,* is without holiness, and deserves not the name of a work of the Spirit.

The incapacity of discerning and understanding spiritual truths, is of the moral or culpable kind ; but that it should be wholly distinct from unwillingness, yet blameable, we *cannot* believe if we *would*. An illumination of the mind, which is independent of choice, must consist, either in an immediate communication of ideas, which the party had not possessed, and could not obtain ; or in such a physical rectification of his intellectual faculties, as implies an antecedent mental incapacity to have attained such knowledge. Upon either supposition, the absence of it had been no personal fault. But if light be considered the work of the Spirit, as faith is ; and both consequent upon the change of the heart, which he accomplishes ; then mental darkness is a moral and criminal inability, being a voluntary state. Then also the apology for it, furnished by the Presbyterian, and so pleasing to the carnal mind, is removed, and the justice of God in withholding grace, and punishing sin, is satisfactorily clear.

Though an indisposition to holiness, be represented in the Scriptures as a defect of ability, yet the terms *willing* and *able* are not precisely synonymous. As the indisposition constitutes the inability, so the supernatural communication of a disposition, or new heart, is the gift of moral ability, whereby the party is made willing. Human nature resists till conquered, when renewed it co-operates. Knowledge, repentance, and faith, as they result, upon renovation, are gifts ; as commanded, duties ; as they follow the voluntary application of the contemplative powers of the soul, they are rational and moral actions. The production of a right disposition was anciently referred to *preventing*, that is to antecedent, grace ; the exercise of the renew-

* "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God," ΠΙΣΤΙΣ signifies *persuasion*, which, when saving, implies *moral* as well as "*natural ability*;" No man can say (has moral ability to say) "that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." ΑΠΙΣΤΕΙΑ *unbelief*, signifies the *obstinacy*, which belongs to the unrenewed heart.

ed heart was attributed to *assisting grace*.* In each instance the power exercised is secret, supernatural, and productive of moral effects; and in the first, instantaneous.† It is grace, because justice neither requires nor forbids it, and because we have a perishing need of it. But it implies no such antecedent physical inability, as that which the unhappy Essay furnishes for the defence of the impenitent. On the contrary, every culpable inability, though radically a defect of original righteousness, may well be referred to the unwillingness of man, as was done by the last General Assembly in their Narrative.‡

* "Quare absque gratia Dei, quæ per Christum est, nos præveniente ut velimus, et cooperante dum volumus, ad pietatis opera facienda, quæ Deo grata sunt, et accepta, nihil valemus." *Articulus decimus Eccles. Anglic.*

† "Aut mortuus quis est aut vivus, ut naturaliter, sic quoque Spiritu- aliter; in statu gratiæ, aut in statu maledictionis versatur—vel regenitus est, vel irrogenitus." *Bernardin. De Moor, Pars IV. p. 496.*

‡ The editor, who had long ago strangely contrasted the co-extensiveness of the demands of law and justice, and man's natural ability, with his total moral inability to keep the commandments, could not remain indifferent to the struggles of his own confused hypothesis, but has aided the text itself of the review with a "legerdemain;" and in a note, auxiliary to the main design, has made an attack upon the words, "their misery and their ruin are chargeable, *wholly upon their own unwillingness* to accept the merciful provision made in the Gospel;" which the Christian had adduced from the Assembly's Narrative for 1819. He asserts "it is *not true*, that the destruction of the finally impenitent is chargeable, wholly upon their unwillingness to accept of the merciful provision made in the Gospel." The Assembly must have intended, by the general term *unwillingness*, to express that defect of a holy disposition, or that opposition of heart, which rejects the offers of mercy. But the editor understands by *unwillingness*, the "want of a right volition." His words are, "But we ask, why do they not will to accept? Because, they neither love, nor desire to accept of mercy on the terms of the Gospel. Their want of *love* and *desire*, two feelings and not volitions, are then, in part, the occasion of their ruin; so that it must not be "charged wholly to their unwillingness, or want of a right volition." Had the Assembly used even the phrase, *want of a will*, in the place of *unwillingness*, which is more extensive, the *want of a volition* would have been an inadequate representation; for *volition* expresses an act, *will* a class of active powers; but in this connexion, it would have denoted the bent or inclination of the soul. Neither the idea of *right*, nor its opposite, was implied in the word *unwillingness*, but in the words following, which discover the object of the aversion, and consequently its nature. So that *unwillingness*, cited from the Narrative, neither signifies there the *want of a volition*, nor the *want of a right volition*. It is equally without reason, that *love* has been represented to be a more general term than *unwillingness*. The latter is not only put for an indisposition to spiritual good under every aspect, and influencing its possessor under all circumstances, but it is an abstract term, and as broad as the extent of Gospel blessings, which are its expressed object. Upon this, the Assembly charge the ruin of the impenitent, and not upon any blindness of the understanding, except so far as imputable, and

In support of his Essay, the Presbyterian asks, "How can it be just in the Creator, to demand from his creatures an obedience, which they are unable to yield, and then to punish them for *inevitable* disobedience?" He then observes, this "is the objection, which infidels urge against the truth. We do not apprehend that the objection of infidels would be fairly answered, merely by declaring our belief, and calling his (man's) inability, *moral*. We should regard it, as a disingenuous begging the question in dispute." p. 450. The Saviour, in the terms, "ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life," has been generally thought to blame their unwillingness. If those, whom he addressed, had been subjected to any other insuperable inability, the omission of which would have rendered crimination disingenuous, he would not have uttered it. To blame their enmity of heart as the cause of the ruin of the wicked, is, *if He was correct*, surely not begging the question. To account the inability, which is destructive, merely moral, is by no means an admission, that human corruption is a defect in one faculty only, for its effects may reach every faculty: and yet each considered alone, and all of the faculties together, may be fully able for all that is required of man, with respect to them; and *sufficiently ample* to justify his condemnation. It is the person, and not any power of the mind, he possesses, who is the subject of blame. Nor can he be culpable under a merely personal aspect, for any thing, which he could not have done, or prevented, had he chosen. The exercise and direction of the contemplative faculties, depend upon the choice, and so far they are of a moral nature, may be sources of guilt, and bring us under condemnation. If possess-

embraced in the term *unwillingness*. When, therefore, that venerable body used the generic and abstract term *unwillingness*, to denote the root of human corruption, and gave notice of the extensiveness of their meaning, by declaring the object of such aversion to be the mercies of the Gospel, which contain all others, whether temporal, spiritual, or eternal, it is submitted, whether the editor can be justified by any rules of propriety, or decorum, in charging so large, and learned, and respectable an assemblage of the highest officers in the church, judicially sitting, in the supreme judicature of that church, with speaking, in a solemn address to their whole community, that which is "NOT TRUE."

ing a sound understanding, man, who is naturally averse to God, refuses to attend to evidence of spiritual truth, his ignorance, though not *in itself* criminal, is a proof of his guilt; but if his intellectual powers were too imbecile, or the attainment of such evidence of truth beyond his reach, his ignorance is not imputable. The contemplative powers of the mind are as strictly instruments, as are the eyes, or the spectacles; an inability in any of them, apart from their voluntary application, is not imputable, but extenuative. "This is the condemnation," not that there is invincible darkness, but because men "*love*" darkness, that is, are defective of the love of spiritual truth. If it be alleged that the will is not concerned, in the contemplation of truth; we answer, that the application of the understanding is referrible to the choice; but if the latter be wholly removed, all morality is excluded from such mental exercise. So far as ignorance is a natural inability, it is an excuse; it is imputable only when vincible, that is, voluntary. Does the Presbyterian's conscience smite him, because his knowledge is not as great, as it will be ten years hence, should he live, which Heaven grant, or because he understands not spiritual things, with equal clearness, as did the apostle of the Gentiles? Why does it not? but because these things depend not upon his election. To omit therefore, in a charge of guilt, the inability of the understanding, except so far as it is a moral, that is voluntary defect, and to impute only the want of a heart, which may affect the exercise of every faculty, is neither *disingenuousness*, nor *begging the question*.

The word *will*, which is often used for the active, moral, or voluntary powers of the soul, the Presbyterian restricts to the single faculty, which follows the dictates of the understanding. If we should adopt this sense, and imagine a darkness of intellect, wholly involuntary, and remediable only by a supernatural influence, how could ignorance be imputable as personal guilt, where the will follows its best light, and the man can obtain no better? To denominate this inability culpable, which is natural, not moral, approximates more nearly a *beg-*

ging the question. Even the *will*, viewed merely as an instrument, loses its morality. Moral purity is a quality of the disposition, and moral evil, a defect of rectitude of heart, which lie beyond the actings of either the understanding or the will. If the faculty of the *memory* be corrupt, it can be so only in its connexion with the will, or active powers. Greater affection for evil may procure it a proportional share of attention, and the more dispose us to fix it in the memory by reflection, or call it up for the pleasure of contemplation; each of which implies voluntary exertion. The *imagination* also involves man in guilt, only in proportion unto that desire of evil, which accompanies or actuates it. Thus it seems probable, that all the inability which is culpable, and which may be referred to any faculty of the mind, is, in some manner, connected with the will, or active powers of the man; and if so, it is not *begging the question* to denominate man's culpable inability *moral*, and for that reason to pronounce his condemnation and punishment just. On the other hand, to imagine a just God will punish a "*disobedience*," which is "*inevitable*," and springs from an *inability* natural, *not moral*, is a much harder lesson.

The illumination, to the necessity of which the Presbyterian has resorted, to prove an inability to accept the Gospel, distinct from that which is moral, has something in it, if we mistake not, peculiar to his own views. When we read in our Confession, of "enlightening their minds spiritually, and savingly, to understand the things of God, taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them an heart of flesh, &c." c. x. s. 1. the *enlightening* is not the communication of knowledge, since it is distinguished from *understanding the things of God*, as the cause from the effect; also, the same enlightening is referred, both by the language and pointing, for its proximate cause, to the *taking away of the heart of stone, and the giving of an heart of flesh*; which must lead to the understanding of the things of God. But the spiritual illumination, of which the Presbyterian speaks, is an *immediate* communication of knowledge; for he describes it, as "*a teaching distinct*

from that external teaching, which arises from the ministry of the word." p. 355. Also, because the inability, which it remedies, is not moral, but consists in "the blindness of the mind," distinctly from "the opposition of the will," it does not consist in *the taking away of the heart of stone* mentioned in the standards. Teaching, we suppose, is not an instantaneous work, and therefore no part of regeneration, for "there is not the least doubt," says Witsius, "but regeneration is accomplished in a moment"—"for one is either dead or alive, has either the spirit of the flesh, and the world, or the Spirit of God actuating him." The Presbyterian is at liberty, either to suppose the "teaching," of which he speaks, to precede regeneration, or to follow the change from death unto life; in the former case, it leaves the party in blindness; in the latter, it is not essential to salvation; in either view it argues no insuperable barrier, distinct from moral inability. If he will assume neither, but prefers to make it simultaneous with regeneration, it must be a strange *teaching*, which can communicate the knowledge of all necessary saving truth, in the twinkling of an eye. As then the blindness, which the Presbyterian supposes to be an inability, collateral to unwillingness, is wholly distinct from every thing voluntary, and such it must be, or his defence is gone; so its remedy must not be a moral, but physical effect of a supernatural cause; and a knowledge, in the reception of which, there is not the least virtue or goodness. Nor is there any utility in it, except it consist in saving the convert from the labour, or rather the pleasure, of drinking in knowledge from the written word, "which *is able* to make (him) wise unto salvation." Such is the inability, distinct from the opposition of the will, and such is its extraordinary remedy; these are the grounds on which the Presbyterian has arraigned his brethren, for casting the blame of the destruction of the impenitent, upon the neglect, or abuse of natural powers, which he thinks they do not possess. The remedy he has proposed not only indemnifies the guilty, but can yield no relief. For his imaginary teaching, if it had all the efficacy of the inspiration of suggestion,

could never produce that delightful illumination, which the change of heart daily produces in converts. As no verbal description of a beautiful prospect, pleasant fruit, or transporting harmony, can please like the things themselves; so no increase of knowledge can render the beauties of holiness lovely, without a change of the disposition.

“How exactly the *views of the Presbyterian* harmonize with those of *that great man* (Calvin) in regard to the language proper to be used in treating of the inability of man,” p. 447, he has shown by the introduction of passages from the Institutes, originally written to prove man’s inability so to obey the law, as *to be justified by his works*, p. 448. The orthodoxy of the Presbyterian on that point, had not been questioned. With the exception of his conformity to Calvin’s ideas of toleration, we hope he is more correct than that excellent reformer, on several subjects, that could be mentioned. To call any mere man master, shackles investigation, prejudices the understanding, and gratifies the vanity of orthodoxy at the expense of conscience. Man has the natural, but not the moral ability to *believe and obey* so as to be saved. Does Calvin deny this? He admits that fallen man possesses “natural talents,” but has lost the “supernatural” ones. Here is that distinction which the Essay alternately admits, and repudiates throughout; at length, in the review, the Presbyterian cuts its nerve, and boldly asserts an inability distinct from unwillingness, p. 354. Thus are sin and sinners furnished, if the effort should succeed, with a defence against the claims of justice, by a pious Presbyterian.

When the Scriptures describe the renewed man, as one who, “after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness,” they imply an antecedent moral depravation. That this was total, immediately in the active powers, and mediately in the contemplative, which are exercised voluntarily, reason accords. Remove all natural ability, and man ceases to be responsible; take away his capacity of moral discrimination, and he cannot transgress. Blunted it is, since holiness renders

the mind more exquisitely sensible of sin. The will uses the understanding for its own purposes, and sends it out a pioneer to discover the path to happiness. When corrupted, she abuses her instrument; when purified, the whole man is renewed, but not wholly: "It is the heart to which," says Charnock, "the Spirit is directed in his commission to us." And He, who best knows man, demands the whole, when he says "give me thy heart." The quotations introduced by the Presbyterian from our standards, to prove an inability, distinct from indisposition, are probably all designed of moral inability; and if so, irrelevant. The words *unable and unwilling* occurring together, when the object or effect is moral good, argue but a moral defect. The unwillingness may well express the aversion to holiness, whilst the term *unable* may denote the incapacity resulting from the indisposition to do good actions; or the incurableness of the moral malady, without supernatural aid. Many scriptures represent blindness as the effect of aversion. It is an incapacity; and considered as an effect, it is not essential to human nature; if it were a *natural inability*, it would remain after renovation, nor would it exclude from heaven. When the heart is changed, this incapacity soon finds its relief. If blindness were an inability, which only supernatural aid, other than the grace which changes the heart, must remove, why should Paul have been commissioned to turn men from darkness to light? The doctrine of an inability, by supposition natural and immoveable, except by supernatural power, and as culpable as if moral, impeaches Divine justice, exculpates the impenitent, hardens the wicked, and has a tendency to drive the hopeless saint to despair.

Man is dependent upon providence and grace, for ability, disposition, and every thing. *Repentance, faith and obedience*, are to be sought as gifts, and performed as duties; without natural ability, they could not be duties; without moral inability, they need not be graces. Without the former, exhortations to perform them were useless; without the latter, they could neither be the subjects, nor the effects of prayer. Without the former,

there could be no guilt in the omission of them ; without the latter, they could not be blessings.

If the Presbyterian will venture beyond his circle of mysteriousness, and show us how his culpable inability, in which the will has no concern, constitutes its unhappy, but helpless possessor, vicious, we will not be behind his editor in our applause. But notwithstanding his self-gratulating orthodoxy, in the firm belief of the moral corruption of every natural faculty, yet it seems to be the voice of common sense, that, " Our natural faculties are surely as fit for the service of God, as for any baser purpose ; the inability is only moral."* The acts of the understanding are no otherwise moral, than as they can be referred to the will, and so of other faculties, as has been shown. If blindness, that is ignorance, be invincible, and the will be holden in the chains of a natural, that is physical, inability, we shall presume innocence to be commensurate with compulsion, until the contrary can be shown. But the generality and antiquity of the distinction are well understood, and present a strong presumption against the sentiments of the Essay. The Christian, in this view, introduced from Dr. Watts, these words : " Man has not lost his natural powers to obey this law ; he is bound then as far as natural powers will reach. I own his faculties are greatly corrupted by vicious inclinations, or sinful propensities, which has been happily called by our divines a *moral inability* to fulfil the law, rather than a natural impossibility of it." To which the Presbyterian has answered ; " But had Dr. Watts been pressed on that subject, would he not have been compelled to acknowledge, that this inability is natural, as well as moral ?" If Dr. Watts had been subjected to all the *pressure*, which this offensive paragraph could provoke, he could never have acknowledged, that he meant by moral inability, that which is *natural*, in the sense of that term, three times used in the passage : for moral inability is no constituent of man's original nature, though it be now connatural to him. Whilst his powers are natural, that is, are parts

* Witherspoon's Works, 1 vol. p. 45.

of his nature, his moral inability, though inherited, is not such, but is a defect of a rectitude, or moral image, in which man was created. If the Doctor had acknowledged all that the Presbyterian could expect, that moral inability is natural, or inherited, this truth could neither help his case, nor produce any confusion; for the responsibility of the moral agent remains, and moral inability is not placed upon the footing of natural, to indemnify its possessor. Dr. Watts not only adopts the distinction, which is so obnoxious, and that in its proper terms, and accounts it a happy one; but applies it with proper judgment; for he declares man to be "bound (to obey the law) as far as natural powers will reach." By which terms he plainly means, that the extent of duty is measured by that of man's *natural ability*. The foundation of moral obligation is the will of God. But since his law is of unlimited extent, and absolutely perfect, he measures the duty, particularly required of each individual, by the natural ability of every man, and will demand much only of him, to whom much has been intrusted. When Dr. Watts affirms, that *moral inability* constitutes no natural impossibility, he not only admits the extent of human corruption, and casts the blame of it on man, but implies, that his salvation is of grace. It ought also to be noticed, that this distinction, which Dr. Watts thus gives with the utmost succinctness and simplicity, and of which he declares his own approbation, he has also expressly shown was not peculiar to himself, but recognized by the divines of his country and denomination. The works of Twisse, Howe, Charnock, Bates,* and others,

* "In Adam by creation we were possessed of it," (moral inability), "in Adam by his corruption we were divested of it; we have not lost the *physical*, but the *moral nature* of these faculties; not the faculties themselves, but the moral goodness of them.—If man wanted faculties, this want would excuse him in his most extravagant actions: no creature is bound to that, which is simply impossible; nay, without those faculties, he could not act as a rational creature, and so were utterly incapable of sinning." *Charnock*, Vol. IV. 450.

"To command a thing simply impossible, is not congruous to the wisdom, holiness and righteousness of God, it would not be justice, but cruelty; no wise man will invite another, by any promises, to do that which is simply impossible; no just judge will punish a man for not observing such a precept; no righteous and merciful person would impose such a command.

who held and taught this distinction, were read by our fathers, and have been delivered to us, as containing the doctrines of the Presbyterian church. Our preachers address the wicked in the same style; "you call yourselves by the name of Christ, you press to ordinances, crowd his courts, contend for his doctrines, and hope for his glory; but you are rotten at the core; the heart is not changed, the cross is despised, you are yet carnal, and though from childhood you have been invited, beseeched, and pressed to come in, *you cannot*; but remember, you are straitened in your own bowels, your *cannot* is no more than a *will not*, and if the sentence has gone forth, 'Ephraim is joined to his idols, let him alone,' your ruin is chargeable upon your own selves, your blood be upon you."

The pious Presbyterian does, "charge home upon the consciences of his hearers," our Lord's reproof, "you will not come unto me, that ye might have life," p. 458; but he also deems it *important* to inculcate that man "is unable, as well as unwilling, to perform his whole duty." *ibid.* Thus the Presbyterian spends his strength, with pious zeal and unquestionable sincerity, in efforts to bring men to believe that, of which he himself is persuaded, that *men are guilty for not doing that which they could not if they would.* It is in vain that he asks, "Does it," the Essay, "strip man of those intellectual and moral powers, that are necessary to constitute him an accountable agent?" "Who ever contended that man is destitute of those mental faculties?" True, the denial of those powers of our nature would argue insanity, or something worse. But the Presbyterian is so impressed with man's total inability, *natural* as well as *moral*, and so prejudiced against all

But these commands of the gospel are not impossible in their own nature, but in regard of our perversity and contumacy" *Charnock*, Vol. IV. p. 574.

"This disability is vicious and culpable, and can be no pretence against the right of the Lawgiver. A *natural disability*, from the want of requisite faculties, is a just excuse. 'Tis no fault, that a man cannot stop the sun, as Joshua did; nor calm a tempest, as our Lord did by his word. But the *disability* that arises from a *depraved disposition*, renders a person more guilty. And this is the present case. The will of man is disobedient and perverse, and as soon as it can exercise election, chooses evil; and by custom in sin, becomes more hardened and obstinate." *Bates's Works*, p. 400.

distinctions of kinds and degrees, that he glides into his beloved fascination, immediately after his defence against the supposed imputation of such a delirium. "But does he," the Holy Spirit, "ever inculcate it on his" man's "mind, as a truth, that he had *ample ability* to repent and believe, and that on this ground he is chargeable with guilt in not having repented and believed?" p. 467. We do not suppose that *truths* are supernaturally and *immediately* suggested and *inculcated* in our times; but when the Holy Spirit changes the heart, the party usually discerns and feels his guilt, and particularly of impenitency and unbelief; and such conviction would be unaccountable, if there had not been both *ample natural ability* and the defect of *moral*, or of the heart. Would the Saviour have uttered that awful commination, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish," if those, whom he addressed, had been idiots, or destitute of the natural powers necessary to repentance? "No man," says Charnock, "at the day of judgment can, with a full witness of conscience, say, Lord, I have sought thee to the utmost of that power thou didst vouchsafe to me, after the fall; I would have believed in Christ. Without question, no unbeliever can have that plea; his own conscience will fall in with the Judge, and charge his unbelief upon *a would not.*"* Thus the abuse of natural ability to repent and believe, is the very charge, which conscience makes, in the circumstances, from which the Presbyterian supposes all idea of such natural ability to be removed.

The Presbyterian proceeds, (*ibid.*) "Does he not, on the contrary, generally make sinners sensibly feel their utter inability to perform these duties in a right manner?" Yes, He makes them discern how obstinate their opposition, amounting to an *utter moral inability*, has been, to the using of the *natural powers* God had given them, and how just their condemnation, if He had left them to themselves to perish. "And (*ibid.*) under deep impressions of their helpless condition, does he not stir

them up to supplicate grace from that glorious Redeemer, who is exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins, before he communicates those enriching blessings of heaven?" Piety often exists with much confusion of ideas. Here is the representation of a sinner brought by the Holy Spirit to *feel his utter inability*, and, *under deep impressions of his helpless condition, to supplicate* grace through Christ, which experience is also proved by events to have been of the right kind; and yet we are obliged to ask, Is all this meant of a regenerate, or of an unregenerate person? If he be supposed to be a renewed person, why should not his sense of *utter inability*, and *impression of helplessness*, belong to repentance? And why may not the successful *supplication of grace*, through the *stirring up* of the Spirit, be the prayer of *faith*? And then, how can it be said, that all this work is "*before He communicates those enriching blessings of heaven?*" If, on the other hand, regeneration and its effects, repentance and faith, are here supposed to follow the sense of *utter inability*, and *the supplication of grace, under the deep impressions of his helpless condition*, how came the carnal heart, whilst such, to desire spiritual things, and the enemy of God and holiness to feel his *utter inability* to holy things? The scope of the paragraph was to prove, from the experience of a turning sinner, that it is no part of his self-condemnation, that he had *ample ability* to repent and believe. If *natural ability* be intended, it is fundamentally erroneous; for there can be no grief for impenitency and unbelief, without the antecedent possession, and the sense of the abuse, of such power. And moral ability cannot be meant, because the possession of high thoughts of such attainment is pride; and to suppose that this should spring from the influences of the Spirit is blasphemy.

After a recapitulation, calculated to associate the boast of the fly on the chariot-wheel, "What a dust do I raise!" the farce of confusion is acted over again, that the vail may be left on the mind of the reader. Lest a consciousness of the possession of natural powers should

be perceived, the idea is smothered in confessions of general inability to obey the Divine law, which contain, at the same time, the humiliating expressions of piety, and the secret accusations of Divine justice; whilst the dictates of reason, which must rise against the doctrine of a demand of obedience, when natural power is withholden, are attempted to be silenced by appeals to the sovereignty of the Divine conduct, in the usual style of anathemas in the place of arguments.

The Christian has experienced very little labour, in writing on a subject, which required but the expression of his own most natural thoughts. Some nausea was excited at the first; an occurrence common to those who dissect; but the next review, let its character be what it may, can be disposed of with far less disgust.

The Christian, with the utmost cordiality, bids the Presbyterian, for the present, an affectionate adieu, being under some necessity to devote the residue of this number to the defence of the truth, against the concessions of the essay, wielded by one, who, holding almost no principles in common with Christians, and arguing only to the man, *defies the armies of the living God.*



The second was, "A Candid Review" of both pamphlets, by a Universalist. This writer gladly embraces the argument of the Presbyterian, that, "the ability which is the result of the union of two powers," natural and moral, not being in man, he is unable to obey; and, by means of this concession, he deems it easy to prove the injustice of punishment. "Suppose a man," says he, "is required to run and catch a ball, which absolutely requires the use of hands and feet; he has lost the use of his hands, has he any ability to catch the ball?" Here is the Presbyterian's position admitted, and exemplified; and the injustice of the punishment of sin too fairly adduced from his view of inability. Allow the distinction between natural and moral ability, and the difficulty vanishes; for the example must involve moral conduct, as well as the exercise

of natural power. Thus, *suppose a man is required to labour for his sustenance, which requires the exercise of his limbs, and the concurrence of his will.* If he should suddenly lose the use of his limbs, he is unable, though he may be willing, and there is no blame; but if his bodily strength remain, and he should not choose to labour; he is said to be *fully able*, or to have *full power*, but is defective of inclination, and deserves to suffer; his want of moral ability is no excuse. The Universalist is pleased with the position, that natural power is not sufficient, so long as moral is defective; but if this were granted, it would not answer his purpose, so far as relates to the accomplishment of a duty required, for the possession of natural powers will be found sufficient, in the view of every unprejudiced mind, to justify the punishment of the neglect or abuse of them. But when the Universalist adopts the argument of the Presbyterian, that, in every action denominated sinful, there is the want of the "ability which was the result of the union of the two powers," and thence infers the innocence of the party, he intends no more than the *argument to the man*, with which other presbyterians, who deny such union, have no concern. He believes that no man, "has either a natural or a moral aversion to good;" and that when he errs, it is "not because he chooses to err, but because he is deceived." Truly the Presbyterian is supported by a very hopeful advocate.

As the scriptures appear to us to teach the corruption of human nature, and matter of fact to prove it; so we find no difficulty in reconciling it to our understandings, however unjust it may seem to this writer; without resorting, with some of the ancients, to the traduction of souls. We imagine that one soul never produces another; and that, as the essence of each comes from the Creator, it is pure from moral defilement, yet defective of that original rectitude of disposition, in which the first man was created. But it is not a being, or person, before its union with the human nature, which it has from Adam. He is not, therefore, the origin of the essence of the soul, but of the future subsistence of the person. Thus the negation, or absence, of righteous-

ness in the soul, if we even suppose its existence prior to its union with the body, is not sin before such connexion. But the defect of righteousness in the person, which is vastly different from the absence of it in a pre-existent state of the soul, if such be admitted, is sin. These are the circumstances under which every mere man, since the first, comes into the world. If the first parent had remained pure, his race would have been such; but now they naturally incline to evil, as they inherit his mortgaged nature.

But it is pernicious, the Candid Reviewer thinks, to blame "the creature for what exists in him naturally, and what he has never had it in his power to remove." Thus it must appear to him, as long as he studiously conceals the truth under such equivocal terms, as the word "power." But the creature is not blamed for any physical defect; that only which is moral involves him. Are inclinations to moral evil not culpable? Conscience blames, the voice of mankind censures them; and if they be not sin, it exists not in the universe. The strength of the inclination, whether to good or evil, has no effect to remove responsibility. Neither is the indefectible righteousness of saints and angels in glory, destructive of their liberty as moral agents, nor the inveterate and incorrigible malignity of damned spirits, incompatible with the demands of punitive justice. The strength of the insuperable prepossessions, even of the "*candid*" Universalist, which, for the present, must wholly prevent a change of his views, will eventually be found to be no apology for his errors, nor any relief against conscience, when he may find himself charged with the blood of those, who, fascinated by the plausibility of *his* seductive arguments, have perished in *their own* guilt.

There is ordinarily one sense only intended, of that which is written, denominated the literal, or grammatical, because it is that which most naturally belongs to the expressions in their connexion. If the ideas of a writer are to be gained by an accommodation to the period in which he wrote, or to other circumstances, the sense is termed historical. If one thing is spoken

in the Scriptures, and another intended, the sense is said to be spiritual, or designed by the Spirit. Such secondary sense is received, only in allegory, type, parable, or by other authoritative circumstances. But the Candid Reviewer differs in almost every thing from other readers of the word. He finds that the Scriptures have been written, for a great part, in a popular sense, and are designed to give "*only apparent, not real facts*;" for the same things, taken in a "*philosophical*," or "*theocratical*" sense, are false. Thus in a popular sense, "*men go astray*," but *not* in a philosophical or theocratical sense. Men "*resist the Spirit of God*" in a popular, *not* in a philosophical sense. "*They are lost*" *only* in a popular sense, that is, in language accommodated to the fallacy of our senses," but *not lost* according to the philosophy of the Reviewer. In the same manner, the first parents understood in a popular sense, that death would follow the violation of the first positive precept, but an *intrusive philosopher* asserted, "*ye shall not surely die*."

Much stress having been laid on this reviewer's distinction of senses, it becomes necessary to analyze it. The Sovereign of the universe administers his government according to purposes, which he has not revealed to us, because they are not rules for our conduct. They are never successfully resisted, but always effectuated, and have been called his *decretive*, or *secret will*. He treats moral agents as such, and whilst their liberty of choice is secured to them, it being a mean of accomplishing his own purposes, he has given them rules of conduct, or laws, as motives suited to their conditions and circumstances. These have been denominated his *revealed*, *legislative*, or *rectoral will*. It follows, that though man cannot defeat the purposes, or decretive will of God, he may and does oppose the *rectoral will*, or divine law. Whatever is spoken in Scripture in relation to the *decretive will*, or ultimate design of the Supreme Ruler, is by the Candid Reviewer taken in his *theocratical sense*, and every expression of the legislative will, and every description of its effects, he understands in his *popular sense*. But

to exculpate the man, who freely and deliberately violates the *revealed will*, or law of God, because he has effectuated, like Judas, what the Lord had decretively appointed to be done, without violence to human liberty; or to pronounce the moral agent, who, against knowledge and conscience breaks the Divine law, innocent, because the Lord has not purposed to restrain him by his grace, is to act from mere caprice, in defiance of reason, conscience, and the sense of mankind. The Presbyterian had said, "Man, by nature, is unable to please God." Upon which the Universalist observes; "This is true only in a theocratical sense; and it is true, because God, in this sense, is never displeased." From hence, it follows, that he thinks man is by nature able to please God; and he means it just as the Presbyterian intended, of moral ability, as well as physical, because he afterwards affirms, that, "If sinners are totally destitute of such a principle" (of love to God) "they are not sinners for not exercising a principle which they do not possess." And according to the creed of this reviewer, since every man acts according to the will of God in a theocratic sense, He is "as well pleased with the consequences of withholding" (grace) "whenever it is withheld, as He is in bestowing, whenever it is bestowed;" and He "who has it, at all times, in his power to be pleased, ought never to be displeased." Thus men are, in the opinion of this astonishing reviewer, in the moral scale equal, virtue and vice, rewards and punishments are superseded; and the Lord is equally pleased with sin as with holiness.

As the principles of this Universalist appear to be nefarious, beyond a parallel, so are they utterly without foundation. The theocratic, or decretive purposes of Deity are not rules of human conduct, they are known only by prophecy or events. The attempt therefore to justify the wickedness of man, because it accomplishes the sovereign purposes of God, which are unknown to men, and not motives of their actions, is not only contrary to reason and justice, but a blasphemous denial of all that God has revealed concerning his moral government, both by his word and the light of nature. His

rectoral will has been promulgated in his laws, which are the immutable rules of our conduct, to be regarded at our peril; and must be enforced in vindication of his justice and truth. And the allegation, that moral inability is natural to man, and his punishment therefore unjust, when it is clear as the meridian sun, that it consists not in the defect of any of the essential constituents of his nature, but in the mere want of a heart, or inclination to good, must appear to every unprejudiced mind, an injurious arraignment of eternal rectitude, and an aggravated indignity offered to the Greatest and the Best of Beings.

ERRATA.

Page 4, line ult. for *is* read *est*.

10, — 36, for ΝΟΝ read ΝΟΝ

14, — 33, read *what is* "required, &c.

15, — 10, read "*insufficient*, &c.

19, — 40, for θελη read θελη

In "Moral Agency" p. 22, line 1, dele "
— — 2, dele "